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California voters face wave of 2026 ballot initiatives on taxes, housing, AI and more

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CA

California voters will be asked to weigh in on a number of high-profile races next year, including the next governor and a number of redrawn congressional seats. They also could have a number of propositions to sort through.

There are 36 ballot initiative proposals submitted to the attorney general so far, including several on taxes, one on California secession, and a handful on artificial intelligence that don't have a clear funding source.

Major funding will be necessary for most measures to even collect enough signatures to make it onto the ballot in the first place.

On the 2024 ballot, signatures in California cost an average of \$15.08 each, according to an analysis by [Ballotpedia](#). That puts the cost of qualifying most initiatives for the ballot above \$8 million, and even more for constitutional amendments, which require more signatures. Backers of one 2024 initiative spent more than \$18 million gathering signatures.

Some of the 17 ballot initiatives that are currently circulating are lagging behind on collecting signatures, including a school voucher proposal, an attempt by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association to make it more difficult to raise taxes, and Republican Assemblymember Carl DeMaio's effort to ban lawmakers who voted in favor of redistricting from running for office for 10 years.

Here are some of the highlights of the initiative campaigns taking shape for the 2026 ballot.

Voter ID

DeMaio's other ballot initiative has been extremely successful at gathering signatures, getting the vast majority of the 874,641 signatures needed in just two months, according to the campaign. Campaigns have six months to gather signatures. The initiative would require voters to show an ID to cast a ballot. Currently in California, residents must show their ID in order to register to vote, but not when they cast their ballot. Other listed proponents of the measure include DeMaio's fellow Republican state lawmaker, Sen. Tony Strickland and Donald J. DiCostanzo of Californians for Voter ID, the initiative's fundraising committee. Californians for Voter ID has raised more than \$10 million in contributions, including nearly \$2 million from DeMaio's Reform California committee and \$4 million

from conservative Wisconsin billionaire Richard Uline, founder of shipping supply company Uline.

Children and AI chatbots

Common Sense Media is proposing an initiative regulating chatbots use by kids. Jim Steyer, CEO of the kids' online safety nonprofit, submitted the measure just days after Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed Assembly Bill 1064, the Leading Ethical AI Development for Kids Act. The measure borrows language from AB 1064, which was also sponsored by Common Sense Media, and would prohibit children from using certain types of AI chatbots and add new oversight to AI tools aimed at children. The initiative would also ban the use of smartphones in schools — a provision that was not in the original bill. The measure should be cleared to begin gathering signatures this week.

Tech company OpenAI is behind a second initiative on children and chatbots that has been submitted to the Attorney General's Office, [according to Politico](#). That initiative, submitted by attorney Thomas Hiltachk, mirrors the regulations in Senate Bill 243 by Sen. Steve Padilla, a bill that Newsom signed and will take effect in the new year. During the legislative session, tech companies preferred SB 243 over AB 1064 for its less stringent regulations, although the bills' authors maintained they did not conflict. This proposed ballot measure could set up the same scenario at the ballot box.

Billionaire tax

One of the most talked about initiatives for 2026 hasn't even begun collecting signatures yet. SEIU-UHW's [billionaire tax](#) aims to backfill federal health care spending cuts with a one-time 5% tax on the net worth of California billionaires — around 250 people. It would apply to everyone with a net worth of \$1 billion or more who lives in California as of Jan. 1, 2026. The Legislative Analyst's Office estimates the tax could bring in tens of billions of dollars, 90% of which would be required to go toward health care and support the Medi-Cal program. The measure should be cleared to begin gathering signatures this week.

Uber vs. personal injury attorneys

Rideshare giant Uber is going after personal injury attorneys with an initiative that would put new limits on payouts in lawsuits over vehicle accidents. It would increase the burden of proof for plaintiffs to get compensation for medical expenses arising from accidents and put new limits on the payout. It would also put new restrictions on attorneys filing a suit over a vehicle accident, capping the percentage they would be allowed to take at 25% of the payout and prohibiting certain financial agreements between attorneys and medical providers. Uber has until June to gather the 874,641 signatures it needs to get on the ballot. The tech giant has put \$12 million toward the campaign committee so far.

Attorneys push back

Personal injury attorneys are firing back at Uber with two initiatives of their own aimed at rideshare companies. Consumer Attorneys of California has given \$25 million to the initiative committee for both measures, Alliance Against Corporate Abuse. One initiative would require rideshare drivers to undergo fingerprinting and a background check before being hired and prevent rideshare companies from working with drivers convicted of a violent crime. It would also require rideshare companies to publicly report data on sexual misconduct and assault involving passengers and drivers. The second initiative would increase companies' legal liability for vehicle accidents and sexual misconduct committed by drivers. The measures haven't been cleared to begin collecting signatures yet.

Health care executive pay

Like in past elections, health care union SEIU-UHW is working on another handful of initiatives for the 2026 ballot aimed at pay and profits in the health care industry. That includes a revived attempt to limit the pay of health care executives. Administrators of private hospitals, district hospitals and physicians groups would have their salary capped at \$450,000. The union has circulated a similar initiative in the past, but withdrawn it as

the result of negotiations between hospitals and physicians groups. The deadline to gather the 546,651 signatures needed to get the measure on the ballot is April 6.

Clinic spending

SEIU-UHW is also going after community health clinics serving low-income populations in underserved areas. The initiative would require federally qualified health clinics — which receive higher reimbursement from Medicaid in exchange for treating everyone regardless of income — to spend at least 90% of revenue on providing medical care. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, most clinics currently do not meet this threshold and could be subject to financial penalties. The California Primary Care Association, which represents nonprofit community health clinics, has already begun organizing against the measure, raising more than \$7 million.

Union ballot initiatives

The California Hospital Association appears to be taking aim at SEIU-UHW's ability to keep circulating measures at all. It is proposing an initiative that would limit political spending by health care labor unions. It would require unions to get members' approval before spending dues on ballot measures, and require the largest unions to report their political spending and activity to members each year. It would only apply to unions with more than 50,000 members, a majority of whom work in health care. CHA's parent organization has put \$10 million toward the ballot initiative, and has until June to collect 546,651 signatures.

CEQA reform

The California Chamber of Commerce is proposing a new construction streamlining process to speed up permit approvals for certain types of projects. Under the measure, housing, water infrastructure, health care facilities and other infrastructure would be deemed "essential" and eligible for the faster process, which would impose new time limits on approval agencies. Essential projects wouldn't be exempt from environmental review — which is the tactic largely taken so far by housing reformers — but they would be allowed to prepare a simpler impact report and given a shorter window for public comment. The measure would also make changes to the judicial review process to limit the ability for opponents of a project to sue to stop it. The measure will be cleared to begin gathering signatures this week.

Homebuying assistance

A former legislative leader is working to put an initiative on the ballot that would help more people buy newly built homes. The initiative would allow the state to sell \$25 billion in bonds to create a downpayment assistance program for middle-class homebuyers buying new construction homes. The program would also offer incentives to home builders who participate in the program. The initiative was submitted by Bob Hertzberg, former Senate majority leader and Assembly speaker, and it is being supported by the California Association of Realtors and a group of carpenters unions. It has been circulating since October, and reached a quarter of the 546,651 needed in just 28 days —the fastest of any petition so far this year.

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